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## CRITICAL NOTICES.

## STUDIES IN JUDAISM.

*Studies in Judaism*, by S. SCHECHTER, M.A. (London: A. & C. Black. 1896.)

THE great mass of the reading British public is profoundly ignorant of the history and inner life of modern Judaism. This insularity, as it has been aptly termed by Mr. Montefiore (*J. Q. R.* VIII, 196), is partly due to the influence of national habit, but partly also to the fact that sources of information are not readily available. Whatever tends to remove such barriers of ignorance and to promote sympathy between those several classes who are the constituent factors in our composite British nationality, is worthy of sincere commendation.

In this direction Mr. Schechter has rendered a real service by this volume of essays in which he has introduced us to certain chapters in the history of humanity and human thought which have a living interest to all, and concerning which information is not easily accessible elsewhere. There is a certain charm of originality in the style of his composition which is forcible and clear, lighted up here and there by quaint modes of expression which make the book easy to read.

It would be presumption on the part of one who cannot claim any special knowledge to criticize a work of this nature written by one who is acknowledged to be a master of his subject; but I am glad to have the opportunity of testifying to my appreciation of the volume. Naturally, in many respects, our standpoints differ, but this has only added an additional interest to the study of the book.

The literature of any people affords to the anthropologist a field of work in which by careful analysis he can search for the manifestations of race-characters, and for light on the history and development of institutions. In these essays one is confronted with persons and institutions and a literature which bear a certain stamp of individuality, and on that account they have a peculiar interest; and the anthropologist will endeavour to determine if there be a definite national solidarity indicated in the variety of character and in the prevalent cast of thought. The tendency to cosmopolitanism which

is characteristic of the latter half of this century, due to the increased facilities for travel and for the international exchange of thought, is toning down in all literatures their specific peculiarities; but these essays deal with persons and writings of pre-Victorian age, and they are therefore worthy of examination from this point of view.

The ordinary English reader expects to find marked features of individuality in anything Jewish. There is a prevalent belief that in physique, in literature, in religion, there is this national unity; but certainly the predominant impression which the study of the persons and the literature treated of by the author leaves on the mind of the reader is that of diversity rather than of unity. The physical anthropologist has already learned that the Jewish peoples can be divided into groups which present strongly contrasted types of character, such as the Ashkenazim, prevalently blonde, the Sephardim, prevalently dark, the Falashas, &c., indicating the probable existence of complex strains in the national ancestry. The material, anthropometric and ethnographic, at the disposal of science, is insufficient to enable us to make a definite pronouncement on this subject, but is enough to show that while, on the one hand, Renan was mistaken in denying the existence of a Jewish race as an ethnic entity; yet, on the other hand, the evidence put forward by Dr. Victor Jacques is insufficient to prove that the existing variations have been acquired by an originally homogeneous and unmixed people during centuries of changing environment. The sum of our knowledge of the physical characters of the Jewish people indicates that there is one central physical type, but that with this there have been blended other elements whose hereditary influence has made itself conspicuous in a considerable percentage of individuals. The persons and literature portrayed in the essays before us present in like manner certain central prevalent characters, along with strongly diverging individual traits. Dominating all these is the unifying factor of a highly-developed religious feeling, which in extreme cases tends to develop in certain definite directions, showing itself in ceremonial devotion to the national cultus, in mysticism, in pantheism, or in other correlated forms. A certain degree of unity of thought has also arisen from the usages of the national language, itself at once the product and the moulder of the prevalent national mental character, with its figurative tendencies, and its disposition to subtle distinctions. It is these two characters of religious feeling and thought which have made the Semitic races the religious teachers of the civilized world. Bitter persecution, continued through fifteen centuries, has also been an important environing force in producing a degree of unification in the Jewish moral and social type. But,

notwithstanding these, there are, in the peoples and thoughts sketched for us, marvellous varieties of character; and we can trace herein the germs of almost every conceivable philosophical system, and the outline of almost every imaginable doctrine.

The studies which Mr. Schechter gives us in this book naturally fall into three classes: the first five are mainly biographical, the four that follow are mainly doctrinal, and the remaining five are more varied in character, literary and social. The essays of the first group are the most interesting, as the men whose lives and works form their theme are distinct types.

In the founder of the Neo-Chassidim we have depicted a religious enthusiast, whose emotional nature had become stimulated by solitary meditation and introspection to a pitch of spiritual fervour almost prophetic in its intensity. His extravagances seem to have been those of his time, which was one of religious unrest. The wave of excitement of which the heresy of the Frankist Zoharites was the outcome, and the revival of the Kabbalistic mysticism which had distinguished the followers of Sabbatai Zevi, had agitated men's minds even in the remote Carpathian villages. Here Israel of Miedziboz became so impressed with the idea of the present immanence of God in human nature that he broke away from the more formal restraints of the system of Talmudic Judaism, and became a reformer and revivalist. Around the obscurity of the life of the new teacher there gathered a cloud of myths, evidently inspired by the story of the life of an earlier ideal; but the new teaching was different in its essentials from that of its predecessors, and had little in common with that of the Maccabean Chassidim whose name it assumed, and considering the environments of its origin, it is not to be wondered at that the spiritual life of the followers of Baalshem degenerated, and their system of teaching became degraded under the leadership of the astute successor of the prophet into a tissue of superstitions not unmixed with fraud, and a Zaddik-worship, whose character is sketched in a darker colour by Graetz and Zunz than that in which it is drawn by the gentler hand of Mr. Schechter.

The calm rationalism of the Western Jew, as typified by Nachman Krochmal, the subject of the second essay, forms a strong contrast to the emotional mysticism of the Eastern. He also was a reformer, but of a widely different school. Under the influence of the new scientific learning, and probably stimulated by the example of his great predecessor Mendelssohn, he learned to look upon the past history and future prospects of Judaism from a new standpoint, and carried on his life work, which was the translation of the older traditional views into a new scientific shape, and the philosophical

treatment of the history of his people. Mr. Schechter has given a sympathetic sketch of the character and labours of this great leader of the progressive movement of modern Jewish thought, whose work is often overshadowed by that of his more prominent successors, Rapoport and Zunz.

A third type, differing from either of the foregoing, is represented in Elijah Wilna, the "Gaon," the devout seeker after truth, patiently striving to discover the real meaning of every part of the Torah and Mishnah, and labouring to brush away the clouds of casuistry to which so many of the Talmudists of his day were devoted. In him we see the reverent humble critic who follows with single heart the quest for truth, regardless of the difficulties into which that quest may bring him, seeking no honour or promotion for himself; although ready at the call of duty to take a firm and determined stand against such foes of truth as the Chassidim, whose heresy he considered to be dangerous and destructive.

In Nachmanides, "the Father of Knowledge," Mr. Schechter has portrayed for us the cultured scholar of an earlier age and a higher social position: one whose bent of mind was towards mysticism rather than towards philosophy, but who, unlike the generality of mystics, was inclined to emphasize the ethical rather than the dogmatic side of his religious teaching. Eminent in medicine, and deeply read in the literature of his people, he occupies a niche in history on account of his participation in a famous controversy, and in literature for his many writings, particularly his commentary on the Pentateuch.

The last of the biographical essays is of a slighter nature and treats briefly of two men, Maharil the reformer of ritual, and his devoted servant and "Boswellian" biographer, Rabbi Solomon of St. Goar.

In these character sketches Mr. Schechter is at his best, and one wishes for more. There are many other striking figures in the history of mediaeval and modern Judaism which are appropriate subjects for essays of this nature, and it is to be hoped that Mr. Schechter may, as a relaxation from his severer textual labours, give us a second series of biographical studies. The courtly *littérateur* Mendelssohn, the poets Hallevi, Erter and Steinheim, the Kabbalist Eibeschütz and his opponent Emden, the heretics, Frank and Sabbataï Zevi, and the greatest of Jewish philosophers, Spinoza, who carried the doctrine of the immanence of God to the extent of acosmism (as Hegel aptly termed his pantheism); these and others that might easily be named may be commended to his consideration. Some of these have been the subjects of interesting essays by other hands, but Mr. Schechter has such an unusually wide acquaintance with the literature of the

Jewish people that he is peculiarly well qualified to show the place and influence of each in the development of the national life and thought.

Of the more purely theological essays, the first, on the dogmas of Judaism, is perhaps the most important. In it our author argues against the well-known dictum of Mendelssohn that Judaism has no dogmas, and ascribes the influence of this anti-dogmatic school to the prevalence of the spirit of historical criticism at the present day which is hostile to theological speculation. He traces the development of the process of the formulation of the Jewish Creed both before and after the time of Maimonides, and discusses some of the more important points at issue between the Maimonist advocates of a faith based on reason and their anti-Maimonist opponents who laid stress on authority. The sum of the argument in this essay is that in the elements which are essential to the making-up of a religion worthy of the name there must be a dogmatic nucleus, around which the aspirations and ideals which constitute it are concentrated ; otherwise the cultus will be unorganized and incapable of adapting itself to different modes of life and thought. This condition he believes can be shown to exist in the religion of Israel, and he indicates the nature of those elements which make up the essential parts of its creed. The view of the subject here taken is not adopted by all, indeed the opposite quality is predicated of Judaism by the late Isidore Loeb, and regarded by him as the secret of the astonishing flexibility of the Jewish religion and of its indefinite perfectibility. "Tandis que d'autres religions ont une Église officielle, qui fixe les dogmes, arrête les formes religieuses et souvent les immobilise, le Judaïsme peut se développer en toute liberté. Cette religion, qu'on prétend être la plus stationnaire de toutes et comme figée dans les formes du passé, est, au contraire, la plus libre de toutes et la plus apte à se transformer. Aucun dogme, aucune Église ne l'enchaîne" (*Revue des Études Juives*, 1894, XXVIII, 173).

The article of faith concerning divine retribution is dealt with in the eighth of these studies. The views which the several rabbinical authorities have entertained on this subject naturally vary with their varying appreciation of the nature of sin ; and this, in turn, depends on the views held with regard to the relations of human thought and conduct to the absolute holiness of God. The connexions between some of these conceptions of retribution and the doctrine of solidarity are interesting. If each individual be an integral part, a limb of the body of Israel, there is a consequent liability on the part of each one to suffer for the sin of another, and the whole community may be affected by the act of one member. On this view the innocent may

be made to suffer for the guilty, and the hereditary extension of the penalty of transgression expressed in the Second Commandment becomes a special case of the natural law.

The review of Weiss's work, *Zur Geschichte der Jüdischen Tradition*, is valuable as the book itself is, on account of its being written in Hebrew, inaccessible to the English reader, but Mr. Schechter gives a concise summary of the contents of these five slender but compactly filled volumes, which trace the course of Hebrew tradition from the earliest times down to the compilation of the *Shulchan Aruch*.

In the second review, that of Toy's *Judaism and Christianity*, there is a fair criticism of the author's position from the Jewish standpoint. The spiritual history of Israel is the history of the relation of the law and legal obligation to the nation and to the individual conscience. Mr. Schechter shows that the later development of legalism did not suppress the ethical side of religion, for the production of the gnomic literature of the Wisdom Series was coeval with the period of the priestly code, and after the close of the prophetic age; nor did it suppress the spiritual and emotional side of religion as the post-exilic Psalms testify. But it cannot be ignored that there is another aspect of legalism due to the element of human weakness, which in the case of many persons has led to an undue attention to ceremonial, and to the consequent loss of the true perspective of the relation between formal observance and spiritual life on the part of a considerable section of the people. Hence, when judging of any phase of a religion, it is not enough to take into account its possibilities, but regard must also be had to its actual effects on the whole people subjected to its influence.

The remaining five essays deal with subjects of more varied nature. The two literary studies, which treat of the Hebrew Collection in the Library of the British Museum and the titles of Jewish books, give a graphic view of the extent and variety of Hebrew literature; and the last paper, on the Jewish Community in Rome, is an interesting historical sketch of this oldest European settlement, whose former quarter, unhappily demolished, is well remembered by the writer of this paper.

*The Child in Jewish Literature* is perhaps the most popular of all these studies, and to those outside the Jewish community it gives a most interesting and attractive picture of Jewish family life. The elements of folklore which were, and perhaps still are in some places, mixed with the graver ceremonies enjoined by law, such as those connected with the name of Lilith and the Holle Kreish, belong to a series of survivals whose kindred may be traced in peoples widely separated from the Jews.

The remaining essay of social life, "Woman in Temple and Synagogue," is a useful supplement to Kayserling's more elaborate treatise, *Die Jüdischen Frauen in der Geschichte*, and contains original matter which is most interesting.

There are few books of which it can truly be said that they fill lacunae which were hitherto void, but I think I may safely say that Mr. Schechter's work deals in an interesting, instructive, and attractive manner with a number of subjects concerning which there are very few other sources of information in the whole range of English literature.

ALEX. MACALISTER.

### THE ARITHMETIC OF ELIJAH MIZRAHI.

*Die Arithmetik des Elia Misrahi; ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Mathematik*, von GUSTAV WERTHEIM. Braunschweig, 1896.

THE custom of continental colleges to have a learned essay, written by one of the teaching staff, added to the annual report, encourages the teachers to continued study and research, each in his particular speciality, and has been the source of many valuable contributions to literature and science. From the same source comes the interesting book, *On the Arithmetic of Elijah Mizrahi*, by Gustav Wertheim, which first appeared in the *Programm der Realschule der Israelitischen Gemeinde zu Frankfurt a. M.* 1893. The present volume is the second, improved and amplified, edition of this essay. Elijah Mizrahi (b. 1455, d. 1526 at Constantinople) is well known to the student of Hebrew literature as the author of a supercommentary on Rashi's Commentary on the Pentateuch. When any difficulty is met with in Rashi, the Mizrahi is consulted, and is generally found to discuss the problem in full length, though not always in a manner satisfactory to the puzzled inquirer. The reader of the supercommentary will hardly expect that the author was an excellent mathematician, because he never avails himself of any given opportunity to display his knowledge of astronomy, geometry, or arithmetic. As Chief Rabbi of the Jewish congregation at Constantinople, he had frequently to reply to questions addressed to him on religious matters, and some of the replies are contained in two collections of Responsa, viz. *Mayim Amukim* and *Shaaloth utheshubhoth*. But the work to which our attention is for the present directed is his *Sefer ha-Mispar* (The Book of Arithmetic), of which Rabbi Joseph Solomon del Medigo, in a letter addressed to his son, says: "It is indeed a very valuable book to those who are able to